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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D. C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

**The FMLN in El Salvador:
Insurgent Negotiations Strategy and Human Rights Abuses**

22 November 1988

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Summary

Recent efforts by the Salvadoran insurgency to bring international pressure on the Duarte administration to reopen peace negotiations are part of an effort to appear moderate and accommodating while portraying the government as inflexible. In our judgment, however, the insurgents would not negotiate in good faith, but would use talks instead to improve their strategic position and undermine confidence in the Duarte government. Meanwhile, we believe the insurgency's support among Salvadorans is waning in the wake of increased guerrilla intimidation, terrorism, and often indiscriminate attacks on civilians, especially in the capital. [REDACTED]

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This typescript was prepared by [REDACTED] Middle America-Cuba Division, Office of African and Latin American Analysis. It generally reflects the views of the Intelligence Community. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Middle America-Cuba Division, ALA, [REDACTED]

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Q: What is the attitude of the Salvadoran insurgency (FMLN) toward negotiations with the Government, and to what extent is there flexibility in their negotiating position?

A: In our view, the FMLN leadership is not inclined to negotiate with the government in good faith and views peace talks strictly as a means of securing a more advantageous strategic and tactical position. In a communique captured in February 1988, top FMLN commander Joaquin Villalobos rejects the concept of negotiations as a means to a solution, but describes at length the value of talks--as an extension of the armed conflict--in attaining eventual military/political victory. According to Villalobos, the desire of democracies to negotiate is a vulnerability to be exploited; the negotiations process demonstrates the guerrillas' legitimacy, while at the same time creating an impression of weakness and wavering resolve on the part of the government. The guerrillas also calculate that a protracted dialogue, with mounting international and domestic pressure focusing on the government, would further undercut the government's will to resist.

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Should new talks occur, we do not expect the FMLN to depart substantially from certain core elements of their agenda. During past negotiations, the guerrillas have steadfastly refused to compromise on the following demands:

- A power-sharing political arrangement established outside the framework of elections.
- The exclusion of "rightwing extremists" from any future political structure.
- The abolition of government security services and the incorporation of FMLN forces into the Army.
- An end to all US aid.

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While guerrilla spokesmen may hint at flexibility on one or more of these issues, we believe they will either balk outright at real concessions once they reach the bargaining table, engage in detailed discussions in hopes of prolonging the talks and wearing down the government, or promise token concessions in order to place the burden of compromise on the government. Last year, for example, the FMLN devised a proposal to "humanize" the war in part by curtailing mine warfare--which they realize has damaged their international image--in exchange for a cessation of government use of air strikes and artillery, a move that would have hamstrung military operations and facilitated the resumption of more frequent large-scale operations by the FMLN.

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The FMLN's political allies probably will continue to urge a negotiated settlement to the conflict, but these groups have little, if any, direct influence over the FMLN. Their statements regarding negotiations are not considered binding by the

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guerrillas. Such pronouncements, however, are likely to be tolerated and even encouraged by the guerrillas because of their propaganda value. [REDACTED]

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Q: What is the state of the FMLN's relations with the civilian population and what is the movement's overall strategy?

A: The FMLN's waning popular support at home is its principal vulnerability, in our view. Although the insurgency maintains a following among a small, vocal segment of the urban population and among peasants in areas with a large guerrilla presence, most Salvadorans do not look to the FMLN as a solution to their problems. Indeed, as the guerrillas' prospects for a quick military victory have faded, the FMLN has resorted increasingly to intimidation and outright terror to obtain food, money, and other support from the civilian population. [REDACTED]

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US Embassy reporting indicates that in recent years the FMLN has been responsible for the majority of human rights abuses in El Salvador. Those who defy the guerrillas or who are considered government collaborators--such as mayors, civilian bureaucrats, and, at times, even registered voters--are subject to execution. Between January and August 1988, for example, the insurgents accounted for about two-thirds of the 130 confirmed political killings. That figure does not include civilian deaths--37 during the same period--from insurgent landmines and booby traps. FMLN recruits, many of whom are women and children, often are kidnapped or coerced into the movement, and civilians pay "war taxes" to help defray FMLN expenses. Rural development projects and lightly-armed civil defense units are favored guerrilla targets. [REDACTED]

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Strategic Objectives

The FMLN is pursuing a multidimensional strategy--composed of political, military, economic, and diplomatic elements--intended to weaken and de-legitimize the government to the point where it will fall before an insurgent-orchestrated mass insurrection or, at a minimum, be forced into negotiations under terms favorable to the guerrillas. [REDACTED]

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Political. The FMLN, using front groups and other organizations sympathetic to its cause, seeks to discredit and undermine the government by creating an atmosphere of popular unrest. The guerrillas orchestrate anti-government demonstrations which often turn violent, because pro-FMLN marchers generally try to provoke security forces into overreacting. The indiscriminate use of urban violence has increased as the FMLN has expanded its operations in San Salvador. Bombings--including the use of car bombs--rocket attacks on public buildings, and machinegun attacks on buses have placed civilians at risk. The guerrillas have also stepped up their attacks on US facilities and officials. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

The guerrillas also operate an effective international propaganda machine, and they work to form new underground cells of supporters. The FMLN, seeing propaganda opportunities and potential for expanding its political organization, has tacitly approved the participation of its political allies in the March 1989 presidential election. Nevertheless, some guerrilla commanders remain, in principle, opposed to elections. [REDACTED]

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Military. The FMLN's approximately 6,700-7,600 guerrillas generally carry out low-risk, high-visibility actions intended to "bleed" the 57,000-man Salvadoran Army while keeping their own forces intact. The insurgents rely mostly on hit-and-run attacks on isolated outposts, ambushes, sabotage, and terrorism. On occasion, the FMLN will attempt a well-planned and rehearsed attack on a major military target in order to attract media attention and demonstrate its military prowess. [REDACTED]

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Economic. The FMLN has intensified sabotage and attacks on economic targets during the past year in an effort to heighten its military profile with minimal risk of sustaining casualties. The insurgents also hope to exacerbate the country's persistent economic problems, thereby fueling popular discontent. [REDACTED]

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Diplomatic. The FMLN--generally operating through its political ally, the FDR--pursues contacts among sympathetic groups in Western Europe and the United States. These groups enhance the legitimacy of the insurgency as well as provide financial support. Key guerrilla leaders currently are visiting various Latin American and other foreign governments in a highly-publicized bid to boost their own legitimacy and rally support for negotiations. [REDACTED]

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